Snow on the Beach

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Snow on the Beach

by EarthsickWithoutYou

Summary

“Hey. It’s Adam, huh? I’m Nigel. Fucking nightmare of a holiday season, isn’t it?”

Adam paused, lowering his hands, looking at Nigel in earnest for the first time. He sniffled and his lower lip shook, which was fucking adorable and sweet, and Nigel felt a strange pull on his own heartstrings. What the fuck was that feeling? Oh, no, please...not this again!

A broken nutcracker ornament brings together two strangers who are having miserable Christmases...right up until the moment they meet each other.

Notes

cw: Anxiety, panic attack, very mild and brief self-harm (no injuries). All of which is comforted throughout the story. Excessive co-dependent obsession, possessiveness/protectiveness, and some slightly rough sexy-times because *Nigel* (Adam likes it just fine).

See the end of the work for more notes

1. One in a million chances

"*One night a few moons ago*
I saw flecks of what could've been lights
But it might just have been you
Passing by unbeknownst to me
Life is emotionally abusive
And time can't stop me quite like you did…
I'm unglued, thanks to you" -Taylor Swift

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"No, I don't want us to buy this place, Darko, it's fucking tacky," Nigel complained, dying for a cigarette, restless in this pretentious hotel, and eager to get back out into the weirdly cold (for California) December night to find something better to do.

He strode confidently from the restaurant filled with the low buzz of holiday conversation among happy guests, making a beeline for the lobby, the door, and beautiful goddamned freedom.

It was still fucking *Christmas* out there, too, but at least oxygen was more readily available and the goddamn carols easier to avoid. Plus, Nigel could go have some fun, do something *productive,* like drinking until the New Year, feeling sorry for himself. The usual.

With a cigarette already perched between two fingers on his free hand, he clutched the phone in the other, annoyed at Darko's line of inquiry, as if Nigel wasn't qualified to make these decisions, for fuck's sake.

"I'm telling you, there's Christmas decorations all over this place. I've nearly been blinded by twinkling lights and deafened by asinine songs about fucking holly and jolly. Totally fucking tasteless, Darko, we're better than this-- yes, I am aware it's December the fucking twenty-fourth --" Nigel rolled his eyes as an elderly couple by the front desk cringed at his foul language.

How fucking large was this lobby, anyway? It looked like something out of a fancy movie scene or a dream of artificial holiday cheer, majestic and dripping with light and color, a huge Christmas tree on either side of the front entrance -- oh, thank fucking *God,* or the Devil, or whoever, there it was, an exit from this seasonal hellscape –

The front entrance with its heavy revolving door and pompous doorman in a pine green uniform looked like a desert mirage. Nigel must have walked in circles trying to navigate a route out of merry festivity for the past fifteen minutes at least.

He was so fucking tired and homesick, not for Romania, exactly, but if not there, where? Well, he wasn't really sure, it was just a feeling.

“I’m done, here, Darko, forget about it,” Nigel insisted, ending the call and shoving his phone into his coat pocket.

The pain in his head, he would have to live with for the rest of his days, while supposedly being “grateful” that he had the days at all, since he had nearly died. He was so *fucking* tired of that same old pain. It was like a terrible song you hated the first time you heard it, that got stuck on repeat forever.

His head throbbed on the inside and outside when he got stressed; the pain in his heart from his first Christmas without Gabi was a thousand times fucking worse and he needed to get well and truly wasted on strong liquor as soon as possible. With the cigarette now between his plush lips and his hand already out to grab the door handle, Nigel froze suddenly at an unexpected noise nearby.

“Stupid, stupid Adam, why do I never learn?” A low voice sobbed from the other side of the obnoxiously large Christmas tree.

Nigel didn’t know why, but something about that sound made him change course, rounding the tree to a cozy nook behind it with a warm, crackling fireplace, mantel done up in yet more tinsel, bows, Santa and elf figures, two big blue armchairs facing each other, and between them a handsome young man in an atrocious Christmas sweater, crying his heart out.

A small nutcracker figure was shattered into splinters at the man’s feet, and Nigel lost his breath for a moment taking it all in -- the man’s lost, bright blue eyes covered in tears that streaked down his face -- what a fucking *beautiful* face, Nigel had never seen anyone like this before.

His hair was a mop of soft brown curls, his mouth soft and infinitely kissable. He had on a pale blue button-up shirt under a navy sweater with a big fucking Rudolph on it, the reindeer’s excited smile forming a sad contrast to the misery twisting the boy’s face into a grimace.

Nigel knew what it was like to have too much emotion, too much need inside you, and to have society teach you to hold it all in, so you learned weird coping mechanisms (smoking, drinking, shooting people) to contain yourself, only to constantly feel like a powder keg about to blow with the slightest hint of heat introduced. He understood instantly why the lovely young man clutched his fingers into fists and shook harshly from head to toe instead of screaming.

All at once, Nigel found himself removing the cigarette from his lips and putting it away, stepping closer with quiet concern, voicing words he used to say all the time, but while truer than ever with this new recipient, it didn’t sound the same at all. His voice was husky and gentle.

“Hello, gorgeous. You alright?”

The man looked up at Nigel in a panic, slapping the sides of his own head. He was in total meltdown, a panic attack, maybe. He didn’t hit himself hard enough to really hurt, but Nigel still didn’t like it and felt his heart jolt in worry at the sight.

“No, no, no, go away,” the lovely boy sobbed, “I don’t want -- I shouldn’t have made a noise, made a fuss, stupid, dumb Adam--”

Nigel wanted to go to him, take his hands carefully from his head, but that was an intrusive idea and might just make an anxious person more so. Yeah, he might seem like a dull thug to a lot of his old so-called friends or more distant and judgmental onlookers, but Nigel had been around enough to witness other people experiencing these upsetting anxieties, and sometimes he sure as fuck went through similar shit himself. And he had a *heart*. He *cared*, that was the whole problem, he always cared too much. But this might be the one time he could *never* have made himself leave without trying to help, make a connection.

“Hey. It’s Adam, huh? I’m Nigel. Fucking nightmare of a holiday season, isn’t it?”

Adam paused, lowering his hands, looking at Nigel in earnest for the first time. He sniffled and his lower lip shook, which was fucking adorable and sweet, and Nigel felt a strange pull on his own heartstrings. What the fuck was that feeling?

Oh, no, please...not this again…

He didn’t even know this boy, but there was no fucking mistaking it. Why had he come over here? Nigel thought he was a glutton for punishment, but still, somehow, all he wanted was to comfort the sad young man.

“Yes, it is a nightmare, I mean, not literally, since nightmares happen when – when we are sleeping,” Adam sniffled again; Nigel took a clean tissue from his coat pocket and passed it to him. “But it feels like a bad dream anyway, even when I’m awake.”

“I get it. That’s a rotten fucking feeling, darling, and I’m sorry it’s got you in that chokehold. I don’t mind talking with you until maybe you feel a little better, if you want.”

“Thank you,” said Adam, dabbing at his eyes. “I broke my nutcracker.” With a defeated sigh, he sat down on one of the chairs.

Nigel looked down at the shattered wooden figure on the fine paisley rug and nodded, “He’s fucking dead for sure, gorgeous. But I bet he had it coming.”

He took up the other chair as Adam, rather than laughing at the joke or telling the stranger to get lost, explained very seriously, “No, he didn’t deserve it at all. My father gave me this set of nutcracker figures when I was a child, and I always kept them pristine so that I could display them every Christmas, both in my apartment in New York and my new place here in California.”

“Oh?” Nigel inquired, still badly craving the smoke and the drink, yet held down in the armchair by invisible chains of curiosity and burgeoning, excruciating, badly-fucking-advised affection. “So why did Mr. Nutcracker end up in pieces all over the floor of this lobby? Not that I mind, of course, serves them right for shoving all this disgusting Christmas cheer at us.”

“You’re right, it’s really obnoxious,” Adam acknowledged. “Why do they have to keep playing this music?” He shuddered as the soft refrain of “Wonderful Christmastime” played from the overhead speakers to welcome guests into this big den of holiday merriment. “It is simply *not* a wonderful Christmastime, it’s a huge disappointment. This song is a lie.”

“I can’t disagree, beautiful,” Nigel concurred, unable to help the compliments flowing from his lips and the flirtation mixing with the solicitude in his whiskey-hued eyes. Adam was too lovely to be believed; he couldn’t help himself. “But you still have me on pins and fucking needles about the sad demise of your little figure there.”

“I brought that tonight to give to Beth,” Adam elaborated, “She’s my ex-girlfriend from New York. And she’s an author, she writes books for children -- she wrote a book named after me, about raccoons living in Central Park…”

“She wrote a book about trash-scavenging, oversized rats and named it after you?” Nigel frowned, very much judging this ‘Beth.’

“Well, raccoons are actually much more pleasant to observe than rats, but...if I start talking about that, we could be here all night talking about various species of nocturnal animals,” Adam realized with the careful consciousness of someone who would definitely go off on a long tangent if he didn’t catch himself.

He sniffled his cute, reddened nose again and slowly started to relax his hands where they had been tightly fisted on his knees.

“I’m a nocturnal animal myself, darling, so that would be fine with me,” Nigel said, surprising himself by smiling kindly. “But for now, I’ve got to hear the end of this story. So you came here to meet Beth…”

“Yes, she is here for a book signing. The publishing company sent her on a national tour, because I guess they expect to sell lots of her book around Christmas.” Adam said, swallowing hard at a fresh, already devastating memory.

He pressed his hands to the knees of his plain blue jeans again, and Nigel watched him attentively, patiently waiting for him to continue. “Um, she asked me to dinner, as friends. I thought since we were friends it would still be okay to give a present, but she said we shouldn’t do that anymore because it’s too personal. And she wanted to let me know that she’s engaged now…engaged.”

“Fuck,” Nigel muttered, “Why’s she got to come and tell you this on Christmas Eve no less, after you’ve moved out here, made a new life for yourself…”

“I thought the same thing!” Adam said, excited relief entering his tone.

His voice was like velvet, boyish and manly all at once, sweet, true and irresistible. Nigel felt warm all over at giving him some real comfort, that of validation.

Adam went on, “And I told myself I must be misinterpreting the situation because that’s what I always do. People say one thing, or they do a thing, and I see it another way and get hurt

and confused. I thought maybe Beth was being nice and I just couldn't see it, but the way I came here thinking I meant something to her, only to have that happen…"

"It made you angry?" Nigel guessed.

"With myself," Adam confirmed. "I'm tired of always being the one who thinks he means more to someone than he does. Tired of making a fool of myself and ending up alone again. But that's wrong, isn't it? I'm fine alone, I've worked hard to become independent."

"You can be independent and still have needs, sweetheart," Nigel reasoned. "Humans are fucking hardwired to want company, I don't know why unless God is a mean-spirited jackass, but maybe he is, I don't have the least idea towards an answer on that one."

"Why...why do you keep saying things to me like that, like 'darling,' 'sweetheart'..."Adam blushed, and Nigel wanted to kiss him until the boy got all dizzy and clinging; he bet Adam would be fucking delicious and soft and rough in bed, but where was this coming from?

Get it the fuck together, Nigel.

"Well, I suppose because you seem…" Nigel blushed himself, momentarily stripped bare by Adam's direct questions.

He licked his lips, searching his English vocabulary for a suitable explanation, only landing back on the truth.

"You seem…*dear*. And when I saw you, I just thought…'he shouldn't be sad on Christmas. He shouldn't be sad ever.' I don't like the idea of people treating you poorly. And I know we don't know each other and this is a lot after a few fucking minutes of random conversation...but…"

"Yes?" Adam asked, his face lit up with new interest that made Nigel's heart skip a beat.

"Well, I was just on my way out of this hellhole," Nigel elaborated.

"This is actually an extremely nice hotel," Adam corrected him. "They use too many holiday decorations and need to turn the music off, but I've heard the accommodations are lovely, and the dinner I had with Beth before our conversation became depressing was delicious. They have mac 'n cheese."

"I just mean I don't like it here." Nigel shrugged, playing with the loose cigarette in his pocket. He took it out and tapped it against his black pant leg, then flipped it between his fingers listlessly.

"You don't seem to mind that I got so upset in public, or that I have a hard time understanding sarcasm." Adam looked baffled.

"Of course I don't mind, what's wrong with any of that?"

Adam smiled, the prettiest smile Nigel had ever seen. All he wanted to do was make him smile about a million more times.

“So, as I was saying, I’m on my way out, and I was going to go shopping. There’s a gift I need to get. Want to help me pick it out?” Nigel asked, his heart in his throat, held in suspense over what Adam might say to the impromptu invitation.

“What about the mess I made?” Adam frowned.

“Leave it. Serves the pricks fucking right for playing Christmas music on Christmas,” Nigel suggested. “Come on, gorgeous, I could really use your help with this.”

Adam blushed again, stood up looking like he couldn’t wait to leave, not only to escape the scene of his disappointing evening, but also to begin a new version of the night with Nigel, where there was no way to predict anything.

“I don’t usually like spontaneous plans,” Adam noted, “But I think I’d like to go with you...Nigel?”

“Yes, it’s Nigel,” he affirmed with a grin that showed off his sharp, pearly teeth. “Come on, darling, we’ve got this.”

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“The weather has been wildly unusual for the last few days, including tonight. You normally don’t need coats like this in California,” Adam observed matter-of-factly as they walked the streets, passing by stores with their windows decked out in holiday displays of toys, electronics, and clothes that would make perfect presents.

“No,” Nigel laughed, “I can’t help getting a kick out of all these suntanned, west-coast yoga types walking around confused and freezing their asses off in their spandex and shit.”

“That’s sort of mean, but it wouldn’t be that hard for them to check the forecast before coming out. You’re right that a lot of people clearly haven’t been preparing for the cold front.”

“Mean? Well, angel, I was just taking the piss. I’m not a nice person, may as well get that out in the open.” He shrugged.

No point trying to fool the kid otherwise. He was done trying courtship through an act of suaveness and avoiding the truth of his violent nature, his short temper and sometimes frightening intensity. Next time he fell in love, Nigel wanted the person to want *him*, not a fantasy. And…he couldn’t very well lie to that face, could he? He bet Adam was far too clever to fall for his formerly adept, smooth seductive techniques, anyway.

“You can be a nice person and still vent from time to time,” Adam smiled, paraphrasing Nigel’s affirmation from earlier. “And there’s lots of ways to be nice. It was kind of you to stop and talk to me, and ask me to come out with you when I was upset.”

“And good of you not to be frightened of the tough-faced older man with the scary scars and strange accent,” Nigel joked, the humor not making it all the way to his slightly insecure tone.

“Your face isn’t that tough,” Adam countered.

They paused and looked at one another again, briefly, standing outside one of the random stores they passed, for no reason but this, taking each other in. Adam avoided letting his eyes linger in any one place for too long, but he made note in closer detail of Nigel’s face and eyes, his hair whipping around in the cold air, his all-black attire that seemed funereal in the midst of such an aggressively jolly season.

“You stand out around here,” Adam continued with interest, “But not because you’re scary, not at all, to me, at least. It’s more that no one else here looks as unique as you. You have very chiseled features, your eyes are an interesting shade of amber-brown, and you dress elegantly. Your hair is at least three different colors, and you’re the only one I’ve seen since I moved here who doesn’t seem to be putting on an act, or care too much what everyone else thinks of you.”

“Thank you, darling, that’s real fucking sweet. Honestly, nicest thing anyone’s said to me in ages. And it means something coming from you.” Nigel opened his mouth and closed it again, not knowing how to explain the second part, and so deciding not to, not yet.

They started strolling again, slowly, despite the unpleasant weather, as if they were prolonging their conversation and time together.

“Where are you from? I can’t place your accent,” Adam asked as Nigel paused to check out the latest window display.

It featured a big Christmas village set of the North Pole, arranged on a sparkling blanket of fake snow. There was Santa’s house, the reindeer barn and a little coffee shop for elves in pastel colors, shining with yet more glitter, surrounded by festive porcelain figures.

“Romania,” Nigel answered thoughtfully. “Hey, I think this is the place I saw earlier and wanted to come back to.”

He held the door open for Adam with an attentive smile.

“What are you looking for?” Adam wondered, trailing Nigel down aisles of decorations.

“Full of questions, huh, kid?” Nigel raised his eyebrows.

Adam turned to face him looking apologetic, but then his face lit up again when he saw Nigel’s playful smile.

“I like that,” Nigel admitted, the flirtation coming out of him genuinely this time.

No need for effort or putting on airs of grand imperviousness to vulnerability, pretending to be the baddest motherfucker (though he was up there, surely). He loved that Adam followed him so faithfully and kept asking all those wide-eyed questions. And he’d simply said so, rather than playing games.

Maybe the game had worn him out; well, it had nearly destroyed him, but Nigel thought his own honesty was more because…Adam was so completely himself. It brought the same out

of Nigel.

An elderly shopkeeper with a bushy white beard greeted, “Merry Christmas Eve, boys!”

“Same to you, Santa,” Nigel chortled, and the shopkeeper merely snorted a laugh in return, unoffended.

“That’s not the real Santa,” he added to Adam in a murmur, leaning in close. “The real Santa has me on the naughty list and would toss me out of this establishment on sight.”

Adam laughed. “There isn’t a real Santa, and naughty or nice is just a simplistic idea of morality invented to sell copious merchandise and keep children in line. But that man does resemble the stereotypical image of Santa in art.”

“Exactly, darling, and I think you’re forgetting the biggest reason it can’t be the real Santa, because he’ll be at the North Pole, loading up the old sleigh right about now, hmm?” Nigel enjoyed Adam’s slightly aggravated, but tolerant reaction to his insistence that maybe there was a “real” Old St. Nick.

The boy merely paused and gave him a fleeting look full of equal parts “*are you serious*” and “*who are you, anyway, I really want to know. Maybe I need to know.*” Enough to make Nigel hope he wasn’t reading his own desires into these interpretations.

Adam sighed, “Part of me can’t believe it’s really Christmas Eve.”

Nigel groaned, “Fucking insane. Where does the time go?”

“It does seem to go too fast sometimes,” Adam noted, looking around in admiring wonderment at the lovely and festive store.

“If it’s not going too slow.”

“It would be great,” Adam mused, “To have a reason…to want time to slow down.”

“Oh, that it would, Adam.” Nigel felt a bit too emotionally impacted by this beautiful boy’s insightful comments. They seemed to come from inside Nigel’s own heart somehow.

There was music playing here, too, but thankfully it was only Tchaikovsky, nothing with forcefully cheerful lyrics about perfect Christmases. Adam looked like he found the environment surreal after so recently having his heart re-broken, and Nigel related to the sentiment.

This was certainly the last thing Nigel had expected to be doing tonight, but since the moment he saw Adam, he’d stopped being able to predict a damn thing.

“Here we go,” Nigel observed as they came to another aisle which was covered entirely in an array of nutcrackers. There was every conceivable size and color of the sturdy wooden figures, from the small ones you could hang on the Christmas tree to massive ones half Adam’s height.

“You...you’re looking to buy a nutcracker for a friend?” Adam guessed, “Or family member?”

He blinked, batting his dark lashes, processing the fact that this was too much of a coincidence to be a coincidence. “I don’t understand.”

“I want to get you a new one,” Nigel smiled. “If you want, only if you want, okay, darling?”

Adam’s jaw tightened and Nigel was so tempted to put a comforting hand on his shoulder, but he held back, instead saying, “I’m not trying to be condescending, I promise. And I don’t want anything in return. I would love to do this, if you would.”

“Um…” Adam looked from Nigel to the selection of nutcrackers. “But this store is really expensive. I’ll purchase it for myself.”

“You want a new nutcracker, sweetheart?” Nigel asked, light brows lifted as a playful smile tugged at his lips.

“I think I would, yes,” said Adam with a cute crinkle in his brow.

“Then it’s my treat.” And Nigel shrugged, as if it was a normal thing to be doing on Christmas Eve with a total stranger. “You deserve it, so pick whichever one you want.”

Adam’s blue eyes grew even larger and more glistening than usual, and an excited smile made his face so adorable and gorgeous, Nigel had a hard time not showing his admiration too much. God, he’d never seen such a beautiful fucking face. And Adam was so sweet, cute and smart as well…

Just what the hell was Nigel getting himself into, and what happened to Mr. I’ll Never Fall in Love Again?

Adam laughed self-consciously. “But…it’s…I mean, I don’t *need*…”

“Oh, I don’t give a fuck in this context if you need it. Do you *want* it? Because you know what? You deserve to want something for yourself, just for the having, and to get it. Okay?”

Nigel leaned against one of the nearby shelves which didn’t have anything delicate on it for him to knock over (a good thing, since he was really a bull in a china shop here) and watched as Adam examined the rows upon rows of intricately painted nutcracker figures. They decreased in size as the shelves went up, and actually, Nigel had never seen so many little fucking merry Christmas soldiers. The music certainly seemed apropos to the merchandise.

“If you say so,” Adam blushed, biting his lip. He looked quickly at Nigel, who was attempting to hold onto his usual cool demeanor with all his might and already failing.

When Adam’s eyes met his for a split second before darting nervously away, Nigel had to hold onto the shelf for support lest he fucking faint. Because Adam’s direct gaze was so rare, it seemed to mean more when bestowed on him so intentionally. It felt like a gift, and Nigel didn’t mean to squander it, or the gift of finding someone so uniquely delightful to spend a previously dreary evening with.

Nigel's "*I'm so fucking cool, everyone is afraid of me, but I'll take care of* you, *baby, stick with me*" expression and pose turned into puppy dog eyes fixated on Adam's back and the sight of his soft curls as the younger man went back to browsing the wooden figures.

He could also feel that his mouth was stuck on what had to be the stupidest smile of helpless infatuation which he'd ever done. And it felt so bizarrely…*good*.

Nigel realized that maybe the hopeless romantic inside him was neither dead nor buried under the grief of his heartbreak, brush with death, and divorce from Gabi (which, once upon the time of the most fractured fucking ruined fairy tale, had seemed to Nigel much worse than death).

If he'd lost his life that night on the bridge in Bucharest, he never would have set sights on Adam. Nigel was reawakened to the profundity of chance encounters and maybe even destiny. For now, he'd best keep all this heavy "feelings" shit hidden, or he'd scare that darling, sexy little angel off.

Wouldn't want Adam to think he was fucking crazy…not until Nigel was sure that the boy would like it, that is. One small hesitancy in his newfound honest streak.

Look at the kid, without a single goddamn clue of his own beauty and effortless sex appeal. Adam was thirty-two, he'd mentioned in passing when they left the hotel, but he looked about twenty and had the kind of innocence Nigel had long since assumed to be nonexistent in this world.

There was that fucking – *tormenting*, nerdy Christmas sweater (just begging to be ripped off and thrown to the floor), and under that, a cutely stiff button-up shirt, and then those medium-blue fucking jeans that were just drab and not worthy of such a hot little body. Yet the denim hit him in a few of the right places, tightly enough that Nigel's mouth watered.

The jeans showed off his pert, tempting ass and even his enticing thighs, and Nigel felt sweat gather on his brow and the back of his neck, then made a real effort to think of something other than pinning the boy down in bed all night long.

Let's not get ahead of ourselves, eh? For once?

Nigel's heart never listened to such warnings, and neither did his fucking sex drive, but he would just have to do his best to behave.

What exactly the best-behaved version of Nigel was, if not a scoundrel and a liar, he had yet to learn. Was he learning right now, tonight?

Was Adam teaching him?

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"Are you going to get something for yourself?" Adam asked, very seriously.

His eyes widened and his lips remained slightly parted, moist from his near-constant nibbling of them in this stranger's presence. He had sweat on the insides of his hands, and it wasn't

hot in the store. Even for December, it was remarkably cold considering it was California, so different from New York and its vast piles of snow.

He had been missing that, and now here he was, in this soothingly pleasant Christmas shop, not missing anything at all, somehow. And feeling on the pleasant brink of overwhelmed, which normally would have sent him reeling.

Nigel…Nigel was different.

"I don't know. Let's focus on you first. Don't know what I'd get or where I'd fucking put anything. I'm…a bit of a nomad at present, darling, wandering from one business venture to another. I can't rest on my laurels, so…I haven't…"

"You haven't," said Adam, who had been leaning down to look at more figures on the shelves. When he straightened up, they were almost eye to eye, but Nigel was a little taller as well as older, and it was doing something odd to Adam's stomach.

Swirls of excitement seemed to be dancing under his skin, and his face felt like it was burning when Nigel stayed close like that for a few moments longer. Adam added belatedly, confused at all these sensations and the night's unexpected turn, "rested on your laurels."

"Nah. I've got to make sound investments if I'm going to live in the states. Keep me in the lifestyle to which I've become accustomed, or…maybe it just keeps me busy. Too busy to get overly bothered about…other things."

Nigel scratched his neck. He had a really handsome throat, strong and well-formed like the rest of him, and distracting like the rest of him. Despite the tattoo on his neck which was a bit bawdy, Adam's lips strangely ached to press a kiss to that warm, golden skin.

"Or Christmas."

"Yeah, *definitely* not fucking Christmas." Nigel laughed.

"You hate Christmas, huh?" asked Adam curiously.

"Well, yeah, sure kid, but – I don't know. I don't think *you* should have to hate it."

Adam smiled at him, feeling suddenly like his heart would explode with a fondness that made little sense, given their acquaintance of about a half hour. Why did he feel he had known this rather mysterious, roughly handsome and mildly ominous man forever, and that he equally knew a gentle kindness and hot sexuality that were integral parts of who Nigel was, for the right person?

The boy tilted his head slightly and gave Nigel the three second once-over yet again, making the older man feel positively spoiled by the attention.

"But I'm just a stranger."

"That's just it, Adam," Nigel sighed, fiddling with a random snowman decoration until the bells tinkled, startling him slightly. "I don't want to say too much and push you away. I'm a

fucking lot…my feelings form so quickly, it knocks the sense out of my self control."

With a rueful chuckle, Nigel scratched his forehead, then ventured so far as a good, direct look to see if he had frightened the starry-eyed beauty just yet.

"People tell you…your feelings are too intense," said Adam, in this…knowledgeable tone that told Nigel the boy had his share of direct experience in the matter. Just as he had suspected when he first witnessed Adam's heartbroken cries at the hotel.

Nigel's heart squeezed; he moved a little closer but not enough to crowd him. "Yeah. As if I don't *know* that. As if it isn't *excruciating* to go through life like this. Taking a blow from every small fucking insult, falling in love every time I know I shouldn't, and losing my temper at the exact moment when shutting the fuck up would simply be self-preservation."

"People say I'm too intense," Adam explained to the small nutcracker in his pale, soft hands. He cradled the delicate wooden toy gently. It happened to be a sturdy, handsome, and smoothly painted one in a dark green and blue uniform. "And that I feel too much. I just want to feel whatever I need to and not be judged. So you can be honest, Nigel, I won't judge you. I would really like to hear more. I'm not going to run away."

"And if I said I was a bad, *bad* man, angel?"

Adam looked mildly frustrated. Nigel longed to kiss away that cute crinkle in his brow and suck that pouting lip.

"I said that we can talk about anything honestly, which includes anything about your personality. I don't say this sort of thing lightly, and I never exaggerate or lie. I feel…" He held the nutcracker figure more tightly, almost possessively, and his cheeks turned pink again. "I feel a connection to you in several ways."

"Really?" Nigel's heart leapt in his chest. "What kinds of ways?"

"I'm still figuring that out," Adam shrugged. "Can we speak freely to make that easier for me?"

Nigel scratched his jaw (he had been scratching itches that weren't there and couldn't seem to stop), did a weird half-shrug, tiny seizure sort of thing that embarrassed him, and stuttered idiotically, "Okay, uh…"

"Are you nervous for some reason?" Adam inquired curiously.

"It's two reasons, darling, one being, I *am* a very bad man and I'm gonna speak frankly without knowing how it might make you react, 'cause Adam, that might not be too great, and no one would blame you."

"*I* would blame me," Adam objected. "I said I would talk with you and not run no matter what you said. I would be a terrible friend if I said that and acted against it so quickly, or really, at all."

"Are we friends?"

“Maybe. It feels that way.”

“And like potentially a few other things.”

“Exactly.” Adam gave him a thoughtful, tentative smile. “What’s the second reason you’re nervous?”

Nigel admitted, “I hate the kind of Christmas I always get dished up, fucking predictable, bleak, meaningless, dull, lonely…” He wanted a fucking cigarette but settled for waving his hand around to emphasize his typically colorful phrasing.

“I know what you mean,” Adam replied very seriously. “I’m not religious; I’m too scientific for that. But I would still like to celebrate Christmas and have it mean something. Something, whatever it is, that’s the opposite of lonely, I guess.”

“That’s just it, gorgeous. *You* feel like Christmas to me. Not my kind of Christmas, but the kind I hear other people talking about with their stupid fucking nauseating prattle bullshit. You know: love, family, belonging, all that stuff. Magic. So, that’s the other reason, I want to be around you and stay around you, like you’re drawing me to you with a magnet, but the magnet is just a fucking…*happiness* I could never deserve or even begin to understand. Also, it’s why I wanted to get you a new nutcracker. Anyway, sorry. Fuck.”

“Okay,” said Adam with a slow, sweet smile that surprised Nigel. “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome? Uh. Well. I’m sorry again, darling, don’t know what the fuck’s wrong with me other than I might be out of my fucking mind again. I’ll get you the nutcracker, and in some way, that might be enough for me, in addition to damn sure enough for you and a lucky escape on your part.”

“Oh, that’s not what I meant.” Adam pulled at and played with the white ribbon at the top of the nutcracker.

It was a tree ornament, Nigel noticed distractedly, thinking about how pretty and soft Adam’s hands were. Like everything else about him.

“I meant,” Adam clarified, “Okay, then, stay with me and let’s make a nice Christmas together. If you want, I can show you my apartment after this and we can pick a place on my tree to hang the nutcracker. If you…oh, I already said, if you want.”

Adam grinned, and it was suddenly like the sun came out from behind every cloud in Nigel’s mind, making him understand that there was still light inside him after all.

“Really?” he smiled, “I mean…fucking great, I’d love to.”

“I don’t want you to think I’m propositioning you,” Adam said, as if this remark was no different from the rest of their conversation. But it was different and made Nigel far too excited.

“Oh…oh, yeah, Honestly, kid, it never crossed my mind…”

And it hadn't, in the sense that he didn't think Adam was trying to get into his pants, but when Nigel replied in this way, it came off like he hadn't been wanting and lusting after the gorgeous boy. And that isn't what he meant.

"Then I'm glad that's clear," Adam nodded, looking disappointed.

If they didn't have the plans to "make a nice Christmas together," which obviously would take a while and give him a chance to recover from being such an anxious fucking clown, Nigel might have smashed a few more decorations in sheer rage at himself.

But he couldn't conceive a way to dig himself out of this particular conversational hole, especially since it was equally likely he'd dig a deeper one trying to fix the first.

"How about you, now that I think I've picked my ornament out," Adam suggested in a more upbeat tone that made Nigel wonder just how accustomed this kid was to rolling with the punches. "You should get something, too."

"I wouldn't know what to pick in all this," Nigel winced. "There's so much fucking Christmas everywhere I look…"

"It can feel blinding sometimes," Adam agreed. "As in, my eyes hurt occasionally from too many lights and too much noise. But, this is our Christmas, remember?"

"Darling, I think I can promise that I'll never forget."

"Good." Adam nodded. "How about an ornament? And then we can both have something new to hang on the tree, something special to commemorate this Christmas."

"While shoving all those miserable blue Christmases of ours into the past where they deserve to be forgotten," Nigel declared, brightening up. "I fucking concur, no doubt about it. Let's have such an amazing fucking Christmas that we forget the other ones."

He walked down a few aisles with Adam beside him making his stomach do more flips as he felt light-headed. Finally, he had the focus to pause by a display of angels, selecting a delicate one with curly brown hair. The angel had their eyes closed and they were smiling…silver sparkles decorated their wings in the same pattern that appeared on the dress, which was stars, all these tiny little stars. Nigel smiled at the ornament as he took it down from the tree where they were displayed.

"This is the one," he said proudly.

Adam looked at the ornament and at first smiled delightedly. "It's beautiful. And it'll look just right on the…tree."

His smile fell, but not into a frown, not out of sadness. It had taken him a few beats to recognize that the angel looked like him. He swallowed hard and his eyes looked slightly wet.

Nigel cupped his face and rubbed his cheek a little, leaning down to offer him a kind smile, which Adam tried not to be intimidated by.

To the younger man's surprise, it was easy to fall into Nigel's presence, his warmth and honesty, and even his roughness. Everything about the stranger was plainly open, not one single pretense or attempt at deception. Nigel didn't sugarcoat anything, and nor did he try to make himself sound better or more important than he was.

In fact, considering that Nigel had such a vibrant, rebellious, and lively attitude, and didn't fear anything so far as Adam surmised, he was also…humble.

Plus, even Adam, who would otherwise hate an unexpected touch like that, found Nigel's touch so pleasant, it was impossible not to want more of it. Adam's touch-starved skin seemed to vibrate at the feeling of this man savoring him with such a big, strong hand, capable of such tenderness.

That's how, if he chose this angel, Adam had the feeling it was a genuine moment between them, and it made him feel lighter than air. He smiled shyly and found himself only able to focus on Nigel's chest, and that he was thinking of the heart underneath the skin under the shirt. Did that heart beat as hard and fast as Adam's when they were close like this, or was Adam being a fool and misreading a potential new friendship again, about to humiliate himself if he asked straight out, like he wanted to?

Nigel, meanwhile, had intended to say something sweet to the boy when Adam seemed so overwhelmed by his choice of ornaments. But he was so shocked, once again, at Adam's effortless beauty, inside and out, that he couldn't think of anything to say which would express how he felt. There truly wasn't a fucking word in the world, not in any language.

He couldn't fathom how he'd thought some other encounters or relationships were romantic at all, not now that he'd had an hour in Adam's company. The night felt magical and full of destiny, sparkling like the pretty glitter on that little angel who looked like his gorgeous Adam.

My Adam.

It was easy to be with and talk to, and get to know Adam, even easier to imagine having the boy for his own.

But Nigel once again asserted his self control and reminded himself he had to be careful. He wouldn't blame Adam for being upset that he made a move if it wasn't a reciprocated attraction, because it might ruin their amazingly nice Christmas. They would get stuck with the fact of the disastrous kiss attempt in their minds until it came between them.

He rolled his eyes at himself with an annoyed huff at the arguing chorus of depressing voices in his head and a cacophony of warning bells.

They walked up to the register, and Adam looked at Nigel in surprise. "Did something happen to annoy you? Considering how close to Christmas it is, the store is less crowded than I would expect. And it's been pleasant, in my opinion."

"Oh, very, very pleasant, yeah," Nigel smiled, his fangs gleaming as he looked like an idiotic dork in love. *What the fuck is wrong with you? Add in another fucking "very" why don't you,*

Romeo?

Adam only gave him a sunny smile back that made his heart want to burst.

“It’s only something in my head that’s annoying me,” Nigel explained as they moved up in line. “See, my thoughts don’t agree with each other, so I’m trying to shut them up. One voice warns me that you won’t like me much longer, another says there’s no such thing as a happy Christmas for a fucked up mess of a man like me.”

“Isn’t there a voice in there telling you that you took one of the worst nights of my life and made it into a happy one, just because you like me and you’re kind? And you must feel that you deserve to enjoy this, too, right?”

Nigel shook his head, looking away as his eyes stung with tears he barely managed to hold back. “I think I’ll let you be the voice of reason and encouragement in my head, angel. I never had one before.”

***

“You didn’t have to pay for both ornaments,” Adam fussed after they left. He’d tried to take out his wallet, but Nigel insisted, even though the ornaments were indeed expensive.

They walked down the sidewalk together, marveling at the coldness in the air. Adam had already grown used to sunny, warm, California, and shivered now with the realization he’d have to unpack his winter coat soon. This one was more of a fall jacket, and he hadn’t expected to even need that much protection from the elements out here.

Nigel noticed him shivering and put an arm around him when they stopped to wait for the crosswalk sign to change.

“I wanted to get the ornaments, though,” Nigel said. He looked across the street instead of at Adam, which Adam had recently learned indicated nervousness for a lot of people who didn’t naturally avoid eye contact like he did.

“And I’d also love to buy you dinner. Or, make you dinner, if you’d rather go home now. Can’t blame you if you’ve had enough public places full of people. I sure fucking have, though I’ll take you to a restaurant if you want. I know some that aren’t too obnoxious.”

Adam laughed at his cynical attitude towards “most people.” He could relate to it, even though he usually felt bad when considering how irritating most people were to him, with their insensitive and pushy, selfish behavior.

“Your honesty is so refreshing,” Adam grinned, “It’s going to take me a while to get used to it. You almost talk like I do, straightforward. I just don’t know any other way to talk, so I can’t. But…I like it better than dropping hints or stretching the truth, or relying on body language to express what I’m not brave enough to say. All the markers of neurotypical conversation.”

They crossed the street; Nigel had moved his arm from around the younger man's shoulder and took his hand, instead. Adam loved how it felt, as if they were a couple, and anyone looking would be able to see that clearly.

"I know how to do all that shit," Nigel admitted when they reached the opposite side of the street, where they were walking, Adam assumed, towards the train station.

The older man gave Adam's hand a squeeze before letting it go. "I just don't fucking *like* to."

He lit a cigarette and gestured casually, "I save all that bullshit up for when I need it in my work. It's not like I want to fucking bring it home with me, angel, you know?"

Adam nodded slowly, transfixed by Nigel and how he smoked. It was a bizarre moment of realization, culminating, finally, in Adam piecing together what maybe should have been obvious: he was very attracted to the qualities in Nigel that said he was a "bad boy." A rough-and-tumble, stone cold, dangerous influence. Even if Nigel was also sweet to Adam, he still saw the other side, in Nigel's jaded comments and references to his work that sounded…like what his co-worker Eddie called "sketchy."

His references to the past made it sound like whatever trouble he'd gotten into back in Romania had nearly killed him. There was the scar on his forehead, not especially scary, despite Nigel's assumption or paranoia it might be. Instead, the scar made Adam's heart ache.

But a bullet scar on one's head, which had barely not been fatal…that wasn't the kind of trouble one stumbled into or had launched at them unexpectedly, undeservedly. It was because Nigel was outrageously, irreverently, casually and perfectly bad.

He was a wild man, the sort that he regularly heard his other co-workers, Tina and Sue, tell each other to be careful of, each time one of them inevitably spoke of a new "crush" and said they sold a little bit of drugs sometimes, or they beat a guy up bad enough to land him in the hospital, but they had a good heart deep down.

Adam didn't understand why, but he was aroused by every one of those sly signs of Nigel's dark side.

Right now, Adam thought about the way he smoked. Firstly, Nigel made sure he pointed the smoke itself away from Adam each time it came and went. Secondly, he looked absolutely beautiful and unmistakably a perilous man to know, sucking the cigarette down as if doing so quickly was one bad habit out of hundreds. He had no apologies for the disapproving world or even the law, Adam suspected.

Nigel had a very attractive mouth with full lips, and it looked sensuous wrapped around the cigarette as Adam let his gaze flutter a bit haphazardly over the older man's face and body. At one point, Nigel paused with the cigarette held off to one side and nodded at something Adam said, licking his lower lip subtly.

And that was the moment that made Adam blurt, "When you said sleeping with me never occurred to you, was that…because sex with me wasn't something that interested you, or

were you just saying you didn't think I meant to seduce you by inviting you to my apartment?"

Nigel let out a husky chuckle and did the nervous, fidgety thing he'd been doing whenever the feeling between them got to feeling hot and he knew he was hot and fucking bothered for Adam Raki, whether it was appropriate or doomed, and he couldn't help it in the least.

"The second one, sweetheart. Of course." Nigel tossed his cigarette away and returned to Adam with a puzzled, intrigued look. "Who could take one look at you and not think a few dirty, sexy things? I'm just trying to show you some fucking respect and not be presumptuous, you know? I've messed up every other relationship in my life by going to extremes in one way or another."

His hair was falling into his eyes a little bit. Adam reached up to gently brush it back and Nigel's eyes closed.

"You have very nice hair, Nigel," Adam said with certainty that made Nigel smile at how seriously he had considered the matter – and he really had. "And you're handsome, in general. We get along and don't care about each other's quirks, or else, we even seem to connect because we both have some, and I can say in my case, your more unusual or eccentric qualities are highly appealing to me."

Nigel laughed but looked flattered. "Thank you, gorgeous. My eccentricities don't normally get that reaction, trust me."

"I think I do." Adam bit his lip, feeling the small weight of his ornament in its tissue paper inside a plastic store bag in his coat pocket. He blinked up at Nigel with bright blue eyes. "You can be presumptuous, if you want."

Nigel nearly fucking fainted, *holy fucking shit this can't be real*…

But the weirdest thing was, Adam was so easy to talk to, honest and sincere, cute and sweet, smart and beguiling, Nigel recovered fast.

"Let's see where the night takes us…I'm really fucking glad we're on the same page there."

"Me, too," Adam blushed. "I could explain to you more about my Aspergers, if it's helpful, before going any further. This is usually around the time people start wanting to know more, be prepared…"

"Do you really fucking feel like going off on some lecture to me about it, gorgeous?" Nigel asked.

"No." Adam let out an amazed breath. "I just realized I'm really, really sick of doing that."

"Fan-fucking-tastic. Aspergers, quirks, well, that's just you, and you're – *wow*. You're *Adam*. So talk about it or don't, whenever you want. I don't need any explanations when all I want is to get to know you."

“Oh. Thank you, Nigel.” Adam was startled and didn’t know what to do with himself, but he said, anyway, “Um, so, on a related subject, the station just behind you has regular trains that go to my neighborhood. We can be at my place soon.”

“Why don’t we just take my ride?” Nigel asked. He led Adam down the sidewalk a little until they got to a motorcycle parked on the street near the hotel where they’d met.

“I’ve never been on a motorcycle before,” Adam said, mildly fretting, which Nigel immediately noticed.

“If you don’t want to, let’s just take the train, like you said. I don’t mind, I swear to fucking God, darling. To be with you, and make you comfortable, I’d gladly accrue a stack of parking tickets leaving this bike here. I’d leave it here and never come back for it if you told me to. It’s the craziest fucking thing, but I will do *anything* for you. You may as well just ask for whatever your little heart desires.”

Adam’s “little heart” skipped a beat and he felt so, so overcome with a joy he couldn’t believe, but had to.

“Then,” Adam smiled, “I would like to try riding on the motorcycle with you. If I don’t enjoy it, I know you’ll stop and we can take the train. I always thought motorcycles were a bad idea, as the exposure of its basic design renders it a likelier candidate for damage in a collision as well as human injury. But I’m sure you know how to drive it well, and I think it might be, umm, exciting?”

Nigel grinned wickedly and blushed, tossing a helmet to Adam, who strapped it on, then frowned when Nigel got on the front without bothering to wear one as well.

“I never think of it, is all,” Nigel shrugged, starting the engine with a rumbling hum Adam felt in his stomach and toes, in the ends of his hair and his lips as he stared at Nigel’s for a second. “After the shit my head’s been through, it might withstand anything, or maybe I’m that hard-headed.”

Adam’s only response was to find the other helmet in the storage compartment under his own seat and then slip it onto the older man’s head, gently, but his voice was insistent. He was surprised at his own sassiness, in fact.

“You need to look out for yourself, or at least let me look out for you.” He strapped the helmet properly under Nigel’s chin and nestled into place behind him on the seat.

Nigel held the bike easily upright, even when one hand suddenly shot out to Adam’s, placing it on his belly and pressing it there. He was breathing quickly, and Adam wondered if his concern and bossiness had made Nigel feel more affection than he had in a long time.

“Hold on tight, baby,” Nigel said gruffly, and Adam did, hugging Nigel’s middle firmly and even brushing his cheek against the older man’s broad shoulder.

He felt all the uncharacteristically wild adventure of this decision to spend the night with Nigel, and he felt completely secure and taken care of for the very same reason. Maybe for

the first time ever, feeling this way in any romantic context. That instead of an annoying burden and someone to be tolerated, he was the treasure, the precious one, someone Nigel actually wanted to impress and treat well. And this consideration came before whatever Nigel wanted for himself from Adam.

But…Adam was incredibly glad the man did want things from him.

Adam gave directions to his place, then closed his eyes as Nigel set off, because he didn't need the city speeding by or the starry sky, he didn't care about the cold. He needed just to concentrate on the warm, powerful, dangerous body he held and clung to so closely. And then, they were flying.

***

2. Dancing in a snow globe, round and round

"Just make it snow in California?
I'll even settle for rain
Don't want him to go tomorrow mornin'
Give me somethin' to make him stay
Wrapped in his arms by the fireplace
Will be the perfect gift
Let it snow, let it snow, let it snow" -Ariana Grande

***

At Adam's apartment, Nigel did his best not to overreact to anything. Like how fucking adorable the boy was in all his little organized habits and neat ways, his goody-two-shoes fucking nerdiness that knocked Nigel's fucking socks off somehow, more than the sexiest negligee or the naughtiest dirty talk could ever do. That fucking geeky little sweater was driving him insane.

"So, point me to the food, or a place to order some, angel," Nigel said when they got to the kitchen. "I meant it, I'll handle dinner. You deserve it after the night you've had."

"It was more of a bad late afternoon," Adam explained. "Since meeting you, it hasn't been a bad night at all."

"In that case, I'll take care of it just because."

Nigel couldn't possibly know what he was doing to Adam with these things he said so breezily…could he?

"I appreciate that, but if you don't mind us having what I usually eat, it isn't going to take you very long." Adam smiled bashfully and took two of each item out of the freezer: Amy's Mac 'n Cheese and steamfresh broccoli florets.

"Perfect. You should have your favorites. Let me take care of everything," Nigel laughed gently. "I'll even set the table. You just relax."

“I’ll try,” Adam said frankly, sitting down at the small table near a window, through which they could see a lot of Christmas lights on the trees lining the streets, and in the windows of neighbor’s houses. “But I became excited by the motorcycle ride with you, and I still feel excited.”

“Oh.” Nigel turned absolutely crimson as he followed the directions and placed the first serving of macaroni and cheese in Adam’s microwave. He then fumbled typing in the command for three minutes, cursing under his breath. “Fuck, Adam. I’m excited, too. You’re just so fucking beautiful…”

He leaned against the counter, comfortably lounging in Adam’s space as if he already lived there. And he looked like a male model, for an edgy, mature men’s fashion line, Adam decided, but also sort of like he belonged in a great, classical piece of art, a painting or statue where the artist managed to create an image of perfect handsomeness.

Nigel’s clothes fit him well and showed off how broad his upper body was, the muscles in his biceps and forearms, his strong throat with the suggestive tattoo, his slender waist and shapely thighs, followed by long legs that any dancer would envy.

“I’m surprised someone like you thinks I’m…beautiful,” Adam marveled. “I realize I dress plainly and conservatively, and usually wear the same outfits frequently, as I find it comforting. This sweater is just because of the season, but if you took the reindeer off, it doesn’t differ much from my everyday apparel. Not very exciting.”

“I’ll tell you what’s fucking exciting, angel.” Nigel gave him a sinful look and Adam noticed he was pressing his tongue to the inside of his lower lip, then licking his lips. “Show you, too. If you only knew the way I see you, you might even give me a good slap. Not that I’d mind.”

Adam raised his eyebrows. “Really?”

Nigel grinned and winked, and then the microwave beeped.

***

Dinner was fine; Nigel was no food snob, and this brand of mac ‘n cheese actually was pretty tasty. Eating a few green vegetables sure wasn’t going to fucking kill him with the amount of fast food and other junk he’d eaten lately trying and failing to eat his feelings until he felt better. Here was the only thing that was going to make him feel better, possibly ever again, across the table from Nigel, eating his cute little habitual dinner with the neatest, most polite table manners.

Nigel’s heart was beating so hard. He tried to breathe. They talked some more and Adam explained a few more aspects of his daily and nightly routines. Nigel nodded, wanting to make sure he remembered all the small rules so that he didn’t do anything to cause this angel a moment’s alarm.

He’d fucking eviscerate anyone who ever, *ever* bothered that sweet little kitten giving him those shy looks from crystal-blue eyes under long lashes. He would tear them limb from limb and want to do worse.

As a matter of fact, each time Adam briefly and casually referred to an unpleasant incident in his recent or further past, Nigel's fists hardened on the table with a tightening he felt in his gut. He'd bash any motherfucker's head in if they hurt his baby, he'd break their body in every painful, horrible way he knew damn well how to do expertly until they wished they had never been born.

Protective and possessive feelings swarmed his heart as it thumped harder and faster, everything in him tense and needy, terrifying him even though there was sure as fuck no turning back now.

He had to *breathe.*

Adam was fairly sure dinner had gone well, and he also thought that Nigel looked nice sitting with him at the table where Adam always ate alone and felt kind of lonely, isolated. Once again, Nigel seemed at home here.

It was sexy, his confidence and adaptability, how he leaned into whatever Adam wanted or needed while maintaining his own ideas and expressing his attraction. Even though he was holding back, and Adam knew it, feeling dizzy at the thought. He had been half-hard since they got back to the apartment, and knew it would take the smallest touch from Nigel to make him fully erect and moaning.

"Maybe we could…uhhh decorate the tree next?" Adam suggested while Nigel cleared the dishes, once again choosing to do the work and let Adam relax, as if he was someone so special that deserved to be waited on and spoiled.

"Sure, sounds good," Nigel said, as if he really didn't mind.

Adam thought maybe he did, though. Or maybe it was Adam's own disappointment at the lame-sounding idea.

It wasn't lame to continue the Christmas they had planned, and the ornaments were fantastic. He looked forward to putting them on his tree and enjoying more holiday traditions. It was just that he and Nigel both needed something else first, and Adam didn't want to deny it anymore.

"I'm sorry, I actually wanted to suggest that we have sex in my bedroom, but I felt too anxious to do it until just now, when I realized how much I'd rather do that first," Adam elaborated, shivering and frightened.

Everything was scary and totally safe at the same time. He was in his innocent, neat apartment with a man whose eyes and hands held distinctly deadly skills, whose remarks on the past only confirmed the theory. And Nigel was slowly approaching him, across the kitchen as Adam rose in his chair to face him on trembling legs.

They were soon face to face and chest to chest, Nigel smiling down on him dotingly. It was a devilish smile and a sweet one, and Adam couldn't resist it any more than he could resist his own deep curiosity about intimacy with the man.

“Adam, you know you’re driving me completely fucking crazy, right? If I let myself go with you, I may not be able to show as much control and good behavior as you deserve in…your *bedroom*.” Nigel’s trembling, deep tone confirmed the intense honesty of this latest confession.

Adam nodded, intrigued, and put one hand on Nigel’s chest, finding his heartbeat to be as wild as the rest of him. He leaned up slightly, murmuring, “Then don’t be on good behavior.”

Nigel growled softly and captured Adam’s lips in a kiss that never had one second of tenderness before it exploded into passion and fire.

Adam was overpowered instantly, drowning in Nigel’s strong embrace and wandering hands, deluged by skillful, yet obsessive and hard, wet kisses that gave him so much pleasure he moaned loudly.

“You sure, kitten?” Nigel was panting, and that was when Adam understood – he was still holding back. In desperation, he added, kissing, licking, groping, hands so strong and skilled, but shaking, too – “*Please say you’re sure.*”

“I’m sure, Nigel,” Adam said, only more certain than ever since Nigel’s enveloping obsession with him was raging almost uncontrollably.

How could he be the focus of all that ardent passion and need? As if Nigel had to take him or he wouldn’t be able to keep breathing. Adam hadn’t thought it was possible someone could see him that way, or that he’d be this attracted to someone who was out of his mind with desire for a near-stranger.

But Nigel’s instability made Adam feel completely stable. And it wasn’t Adam wanting to be admired, but the wonder of being wanted by someone he also found outstandingly sexy and had such a huge crush on that felt like even deeper emotion and need.

He put his arms around Nigel’s neck and kissed him, daring to slide his lips on the tattoo and bite down a little. “I’m really sure.”

Nigel growled again at the feeling of Adam’s teeth and tongue; he grabbed Adam’s ass in both hands with a rough squeeze and muttered, “you’re fucking perfect, angel. The things I want to do to you, you can’t imagine.”

“Maybe not yet.” Adam felt his own cock, thick and very hard, impatiently pressing to the inside of his jeans, and gulped at the intense feelings pulsing in his body. He felt empty because Nigel wasn’t already inside him.

“Show me,” Adam said, when Nigel gave him the “ticking time bomb” look again. “Teach me. I’m an attentive student and I think I’ll learn well.”

He reached out and gently cupped his hand over Nigel’s cock where it tented his pants, and his lashes fluttered, quick little gasps escaping his kiss-reddened lips. *Oh.* Nigel felt much bigger than average, even through his clothing, and he was also ragingly hard, to the extent it had to be painful.

“I’ll fucking show you alright, baby, just you wait.” Nigel took a few seconds to undo his shirt and whip it off, and Adam only had a split second to stare at his hairy, powerful chest and his slender belly with a little bit of roundness to it, before muscular arms shot out and big hands grabbed his sweater.

Nigel let out an impatient grunt and admitted, “This fucking sweater. Oh, fuck, baby, this nice, smooth little shirt, these innocent, plain fucking jeans. You and your body, dressed up like this, do you know what a scrumptious treat you are and how you tempted me all night long?”

Adam’s head spun; no, he couldn’t understand, why Nigel, such a stunning and mature, sophisticated, worldly man, would be compelled into a sexual frenzy by his basic purchases of clothes that just seemed “nice enough” and comfortable.

He couldn’t understand, but he *wanted*, so much that it hurt him, too.

“Adam, ohh, baby,” Nigel sighed roughly when he unbuttoned Adam’s shirt with a tenderness amidst his storm that touched Adam’s heart. “You’re so goddamn pretty that I almost want to beg you for mercy every time I get a little more of you.”

Adam was shaking, that was his answer to Nigel’s unaccountable praise; he just trembled and bit his lip. Nigel saw this and his demeanor grew even fiercer.

“Please, fold the clothes and place them on the counter there with the rest of the laundry,” Adam asked breathlessly.

It was like asking a stallion hellbent on rushing through the woods at top-speed to sit down for a tea party, but Nigel didn’t complain. He seemed more concerned about carrying the request out quickly so they could get to the next part. So, he undid both of their belts and buttons and zippers and slid their pants down, something sexy in the fact that he was undressing both of them with such breathless lust. They saw more and more of each other with racing hearts and shocked glances at how extreme the feelings between them really were.

When Nigel had them both entirely naked, he swore and his eyes blazed at the sight of the figure Adam always thought was ordinary, if a bit too skinny. The older man had possibly never done anything as fast as he folded their pants and underwear and placed them on the counter beside Adam’s carefully organized and folded laundry.

Adam had never expected a night like this when he’d dully done that chore mere hours earlier. The kitchen floor was falling away from under his feet because of the way Nigel was looking at him, hard and relentless in his admiring obsession.

“Fuck, Adam,” he said tightly, and kissed the younger man even harder, licking aggressively into Adam’s mouth.

Adam let himself be backed into his bedroom and returned Nigel’s wild kisses, amazed by how perfect the older man’s mouth felt, made to press to his own as their lips slid together.

They let out moans and gasps as they fell onto the bed and the room seemed to tilt out of time and logic.

Adam held Nigel for dear life, and it was clear Nigel wasn't letting go.

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Of course, Adam had had sex before, in most of the usual ways. That is, he'd french kissed, he'd kissed necks and had his own kissed, or even bitten a little, and he'd done his best while thrusting inside a lover to bring pleasure while trying to keep his own reasonably controlled. That was all he really knew about how to do this.

Nigel knew more. *Much*, much more–

He laid scorching kisses all over Adam, from his neck where he'd also left sucking bruises that evoked shocked, elated cries, down his chest and belly, his hands also just completely… all over Adam, tracing his collarbones, wrapping around his neck with a brief squeeze, flicking a thumb over Adam's nipple and saying again, deep and throaty, "fuck, baby, you're perfect."

Adam tried and failed to offer words of encouragement at the things Nigel did to him that made his body tense, hard, lost to rising waves of pleasure that kept growing and ebbing and getting more powerful just to shift to a new shade of bliss with each groping, biting, licking, sucking way his body was completely worshiped.

He ran his own curious, delighted fingers over Nigel's body, beginning to learn him. A long, ragged scar on his abdomen alarmed him at first, but Nigel smiled when he noticed. "I'm okay, baby. I'll be more careful from now on, okay?"

Adam nodded, lost in quiet, fascinated, overwhelmed admiration. Nigel had been loved before, however briefly – he'd been hated most often, it seemed, and had no other reaction in between, but he had never been fucking admired before.

The sensation of Adam's besotted fascination focused on him in the young man's own, shy but unmistakable way, made Nigel's joy and feelings of unworthiness tangle in confusion. He used his passion to tell Adam about it, as best he could manage, putting his whole heart and soul into it.

The glow-in-the-dark stars on Adam's ceiling blurred as his fingers tangled in Nigel's soft, silvery hair, assisting in his quick descent further down on Adam's body after a few minutes of the savoring torture made the younger man so needy that he'd be embarrassed…except for the way Nigel acted and handled him. Like a man over the brink of sanity, working Adam's body with firm touches, he kept playing with Adam's nipples as he mouthed lower, over Adam's hip with a bite, kissing soft, pale thighs as Adam quivered and clung to his head. His legs had decided their new role in life was to simply shake without a prayer of stopping or holding still, and Adam couldn't do a thing to change that.

Nigel groaned at the way Adam's hardened nipples felt when he pinched and rolled them while teasing the younger man with more kisses and nibbles on his low belly and hips.

Suddenly, he moved up again and licked Adam's nipple, one hand moving between them and gripping their cocks to press together as he started to stroke.

Adam's back arched and his eyes flew open, the look of concentrated pleasure changing to one of alarmed ecstasy. "Oh, *Nigel*! That feels…so… soo– ah! S-so good…Oh, God, *Nigel*!"

Nigel kept stroking their cocks together in his knowing grip, the slick of precum shared between them enough to make it easy to move his hand up and down. And he was still swirling his tongue around Adam's sensitive nipples, but then he was nipping them with his teeth and blowing on them after that, while he kept their hot, hard and leaking cocks held in his hand, the desire between them, naked, bold and skin to skin – Nigel's cool breath on Adam's hot, sweaty skin, blowing over the rosy-pink nub he'd just been licking and biting.

Adam's hips jutted up again and again of their own volition, and without further warning he came, crying out in surprise and unbearable pleasure as sudden jolts of it ran through his body and his cock twitched, releasing streams of sticky cum between them.

Nigel moaned again and kissed Adam's lips, lapping at the younger man's tongue and sucking it, letting go of their cocks for now, instead gripping Adam's head in his hand with a tight hold and kissing him, deep, wet, hot, inescapably, roughly, so Adam could barely breathe.

"You're fucking *beautiful* like this," Nigel said to him, nuzzling into his neck almost innocently, until he growled and bit again, tonguing the small red marks he'd left on Adam's skin. "The sounds you make, the feeling of you coming like a good boy…I'm going to tear you apart, Adam. You have to tell me not to give it to you rough, if you don't want that. I'm a fucking madman right now."

He panted and illustrated the point by grinding down on Adam, licking at his collarbone and tugging his hair, biting a spot right under Adam's pectoral that Adam never even thought about before, never mind thought about someone kissing and biting at like they were on the verge of death to do otherwise.

"God, Adam, too beautiful. Too fucking perfect. I can't even tell you…" He moved his hips, again with expertise that made Adam feel a swell of jealousy, sliding their cocks together.

Nigel's eyes rolled back in pleasure from the contact, whereas Adam felt his soft, overly sensitive cock start to get hard again. He lost his breath and dug his nails into Nigel's back, feeling the sweat sliding under his fingertips, falling into Nigel's soft and gruff groans.

"Yeah, gorgeous, that's it," Nigel grinned, climbing down the bed again as Adam was reminded that he could no longer hold his legs still, nor stop his heart beating so fiercely it scared him.

Adam's mouth fell open silently, shocked again when Nigel licked up his cum and then sucked him back to hardness, too fast, as if he was taking Adam's body from him completely, to do with as he chose.

The feeling of intense erectness that soon after coming made Adam whimper and beg. "Please, please, Nigel…"

Nigel hummed in satisfaction at how unhinged he'd made Adam, and the feeling of the boy's cock, filling out and rock hard now in his mouth. He pulled his eager mouth off, just to suck at Adam's balls until that made the boy cry out in bliss as well, then he took Adam's cock deeper and held the younger man's hips down, choking several times on the full length and thickness of Adam pressing so far –

Adam couldn't resist the overpowering, sensitive pleasure this brought him as he dealt with the new feeling that Nigel would hold him down and show what he wanted, and Adam had to give in and take it. So that Adam felt he had been sort of kidnapped and robbed of free will, in love with his own Stockholm Syndrome even as his captor grew more feral and ardent.

So that Adam felt consumed and dominated, but also loved, truly loved and worshiped, knowing the feelings were all the same. Adam reached with shaking hands to get the lube from the drawer by the bed, moaning at how aroused it made Nigel to see he had it right there for easy access.

"How often do you jerk off, beautiful? Tell me, I want to fucking know all about it." He bit Adam's earlobe and slicked his own cock, gasping at the feeling and his feverish need.

Then, he was on top again, just enough weight to hold Adam down, not enough to crush him. Kissing Adam's jaw and biting softly, he started pressing one finger inside the younger man's tight entrance.

"That's *nice*, Nigel," Adam said in a whisper so sincere that Nigel slid his finger deeper, maybe sooner than he planned to.

"I love that feeling. I want you to fill me up. And also, every morning and each night, but I don't only *jerk off*," Adam giggled at the saying which he wouldn't normally use, and shuddered in pleasure when Nigel started sliding the finger, that strong, thick, talented finger, of which he had two hands full of ways to make Adam come undone.

"No? You horny, naughty boy. What else do you fucking do to this perfect, delicious little body, baby, do you fuck it like this, with your pretty hand and those long, exquisite fingers?"

"Yes! Nigel!" Adam felt reality go rough and blurred around the edges again as Nigel thrust in more firmly and hit his prostate. "But not like this…"

Nigel kissed his face, stroking his curls as down lower, he added a second finger to stretch Adam. "No? How, then, angel?"

"My fingers aren't as big and thick as y-yours, Nigel, and it was me doing it. I had to work so hard to make it feel good, and I didn't feel intimacy. It just wasn't – ah! It was just because I needed release. God, feels good. Y-you make me feel so good. It wasn't the same before, it was just to get by."

“Poor baby,” Nigel soothed, mischief plain in his face along with genuine care and nurturing. “Aww…couldn’t get it quite like…*this*, huh?”

Adam held onto Nigel’s back and neck, euphoria pouring through him with every thrust of Nigel’s hand. He cried, tears slipping down his cheeks, and Nigel hissed at the feeling of him inside, kissing Adam, saying he would take care of him as he kept fucking his fingers solidly, so deep, stretching Adam so well…

“No, it didn’t feel anything like this,” Adam whispered, tears falling faster onto Nigel’s shoulder as he tugged the older man’s hair and pressed their cheeks together. “Nothing does. Please, I need more.” He restlessly kissed Nigel’s open mouth and their bodies moved together in an easy, but overwhelming rhythm.

Adam left more nail marks all over the muscles in Nigel’s arms as he felt a third finger enter him and begin, without hesitation, thrusting alongside the other two, giving him so much and yet not enough.

“Adam,” Nigel breathed out desperately, “You’re so fucking tight, baby, every detail of you is so cute and beautiful and perfect…I can’t fucking handle it, darling, I can’t…”

He left a path of fast bites down Adam’s body again on an obvious path for more oral pleasuring.

Lapping at Adam’s hole now, he moaned in enjoyment and put Adam’s legs around his shoulders, lifting him to get even deeper, pressing his tongue inside and establishing a new rhythm.

When the pleasure tore through Adam from head to toe again, he couldn’t express surprise because he’d realized that he might come any time, when he was under Nigel, in Nigel’s hands and control. And he had no ability to stop it, hold off, no reason to feel he should.

“I want to make you come so many times you black out, sweetheart,” Nigel growled against Adam’s lips, slicking his cock against Adam’s hole. “Ready?”

“Yes.” Adam looked up into Nigel’s face, only able to do it for a few seconds as the older man pressed inside him, but it was enough.

He let all his weight sink into the bed and closed his eyes as Nigel kissed his lips and inside them, slowly filling Adam up, until Adam thought he couldn’t possibly stretch enough to accommodate something that huge…

Feeling weak and tiny, he clawed at Nigel and returned every harsh, demanding kiss while Nigel pulled his hips back, then moved down, thrusting in earnest, holding Adam’s leg around his hips to get in deeper still.

The mattress sank more under their combined weight with the longer, deeper, slamming thrusts Nigel started in on, and the bedframe rattled. They could hear Christmas music playing from the apartment next door and that was the first time Adam realized they might be able to hear him and Nigel, the slamming bed and how the collision of their bodies made

them cry out. He distantly hoped the music was turned up loud, but he couldn't really tell about details like that when this was happening.

Nigel rolled them over, encouraged his lover to sit up, sitting right on his cock, the aching, penetrating shock running through and through Adam like pins and needles and lightning. He put his hands on Adam's hips, and Adam let his head fall back as his hips gyrated, his body unable to help the urge to move up and down on the big, hard cock inside him, so deep, his belly ached with it.

Adam used a simple deodorant and shower soap, but Nigel used something spicier and stronger, peppery but sweet. He could tell that the formerly distinct and personal smells of each were now indistinguishable; they were fully joined and inseparable. Nigel moaned his name and sat up, sucking Adam's nipples, then grabbing his sides and fucking up into Adam even harder, even deeper.

Adam lost the power of speech or even moaning, his eyes roaming down the hard, sweat-shining golden skin of the man who held him and pulled him apart at the seams. Searing pleasure built in him again and he could tell Nigel felt the same.

"Fuck, I'm so close, baby, is it too soon?" Nigel's voice was nearly as broken as Adam's own, and he seemed to be fighting against his body's demands in total earnest, waiting for Adam to say it was alright.

"Was it enough?" Nigel asked frantically.

Adam held him tightly and said against his chest, "Yes! Yes, it's more than enough, it's perfect. You feel amazing, please come. Please, fuck me hard until you come, Nigel, I need you to."

Nigel nodded, bewitched by Adam, by the soft, breathless, emphatic words that soothed his restless soul. "Okay, angel."

Adam followed along with whatever Nigel liked again, because he liked to, and found himself pressed flat to the bed while Nigel lay over him, pushing his cock back inside and then holding Adam close, following the building waves of his pleasure with the deepest, longest thrusts he could get from his aching and nearly spent body.

"Oh, God, Adam," Nigel groaned, and came inside him, spasming fiercely against Adam again and again, warm release filling Adam and getting pushed back in – again and again.

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Curled up and resting on Nigel's hairy, sweaty chest afterwards, completely engulfed in a possessive and needy hug, Adam just nuzzled right in again with a contented smile. He held onto Nigel's bigger, more powerful body and let it overwhelm him that this really happened. It didn't hit him like the way surprises usually did, with a terror or agitation, but instead, he welcomed every repetition of this feeling.

“You’re *mine*, beautiful boy, my Adam,” Nigel whispered fervently into Adam’s soft curls, “You have to be mine. I’ll go fucking insane without you, in the bad way. I’ll be gone, baby, and not return to myself. It’s all you.”

“I am yours,” Adam confirmed, not recoiling from the obviously co-dependent and almost threatening statements.

He understood that’s how it might seem if anyone else heard them talking this way; but that was not it at all. Nigel wasn’t trying to manipulate him; he was opening his heart completely, vulnerable and confessing, admitting the weakness of his feral inability to let go when he loved.

The pain in Nigel’s voice, the pain of his happiness, made Adam’s heart hurt with the same joy.

Adam kissed the scar on Nigel’s forehead, thoughtfully and tenderly caressing his head and running fingers through his hair. He liked the way the smooth, soft silver-blonde hair felt, slipping between his fingers, and how Nigel shivered at his touch.

“Does it hurt a lot?” he murmured, kissing the small scar again, making Nigel’s breath catch each time.

“It usually does, baby, but I barely feel it when we’re together,” Nigel reflected.

He framed Adam’s hips with his hands and felt the lines of his lover’s body with reverence. “I haven’t noticed it in hours, but then, it tends to hurt more when I’m in stress, and before today, I haven’t been in anything else but stress, or agony verging on all-out despair, while telling myself I was the man, a fucking threat to be reckoned with, and just bound to rise above it all somehow.”

He chuckled. “It’s no wonder I had a headache all the time. I might have done, even without having been shot there.”

Adam nodded, taking a few more moments to collect his thoughts as they merged with his feelings to culminate in one vital realization. “I think I’m in love with you, Nigel…and I think before now, I didn’t actually know what that was, at all.”

“God, you and me both, kid,” Nigel sighed, starting to smell and kiss and obsess over Adam’s body again, in a way that said he wasn’t done with it.

“Is it a nice Christmas so far?” Adam asked, half-teasing, he supposed, delirious as Nigel began taking him apart more slowly this time, but somehow even harder. Half-totally-serious.

“The very,” Nigel kissed his lips, wrapped Adam’s curls around his fingers and pulled and kissed and licked, “Very,” both of them breathless again, hearts pounding together, “Best.”

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They fell asleep after the second time, and then, in the morning, Adam woke up still wonderfully trapped in his beautiful man’s embrace, listening to him softly snore, admiring

his smile of relaxation.

Adam had developed an addiction to lying next to Nigel and putting his head against the older man's chest, and Nigel had a convenient complimentary habit of locking his big, strong arms around the slighter man and holding him tightly, right where Adam most longed to stay.

He felt a warm, wondering ache in every emotion, and Nigel woke with an immediate kiss, asking Adam if he was a dream.

"I can't be," Adam reasoned, "Because I'm uncomfortable, and need to shower. I would have cleaned myself last night, but you seem to have sent me into a deep sleep with your antics."

"My antics, is it?" Nigel smirked. He groped Adam's ass with a satisfied yawn. "You'll be getting more of those later, naughty boy."

After showering, Adam showed Nigel where the towels were, but first he had to wake his lover up. "I would have followed you in there, angel, but I fell asleep again. Guess I did put a lot of work in last night. Ah, nothing a good, square breakfast can't fucking fix."

So, Adam cooked them breakfast while Nigel showered, and he hoped it was a good one. Just scrambled eggs with bacon and toast, like he always made on the weekends. When Nigel emerged with a towel wrapped low on his hips, he kissed Adam and, without further ado, sat down to drain two cups of coffee and devour every bit of his breakfast while thanking the younger man excessively.

"Just what I needed, sexy…that means you'll soon be in for it again." Nigel's eyes sparkled and Adam nodded with a smile, blushing.

"I look forward to that." An understatement.

"Hey, let's not forget, angel, between the times when I'm fucking your brains out, we've still got to get in those Christmas traditions. Let's decorate the tree already!"

Adam laughed. "Nobody has ever talked to me like that," he blushed even more.

"Hmm. You mean objectify you constantly? Sorry baby, too hard to help it, look at you."

Adam did look, again perplexed; he had on navy, smooth cotton lounge pants and a long-sleeved, grey henley, but Nigel was practically drooling, as if he was a porn star in lacy lingerie.

"I'd rather look at you," he admitted shyly, almost jumping when Nigel brushed by him and grabbed his ass again like he owned it, giving it a playful swat as Adam squeaked.

"Is that so? Well, then, gorgeous, let's get a bigger mirror for the bedroom. Maybe you'd enjoy watching me fuck you on our very own big screen, see every bit of both of us and get the picture of why I can't have enough of you."

Adam was now scorching red and couldn't even finish his coffee; more heat was not what he needed.

Giggling, he just said "*Nigelll*" and followed his lover to the living room, where his small but cheerful real tree stood, bare except for a few plain, shiny red ball ornaments, a single strand of silver tinsel, and the star he'd had since childhood, rainbow-colored and glittering.

"Speaking of the big screen," Nigel remarked as they looked through Adam's collection of ornaments in a big box he'd pulled out of a closet, "I'd love to make a little movie of how you look when you're moaning underneath me and get some tasteful close-ups of my big cock disappearing into your tight–"

"Nigel," Adam squealed and hugged the older man fondly. "I'll never get anything done at this rate. But yes, I like all of your ideas. We can definitely do those if you want, sometime."

"Okay, okay. Even though hearing you say that makes me horny as hell…"

Adam looked up and raised his eyebrows, prompting Nigel to laugh and ruffle his boy's curls.

"Hornier," he corrected himself, "I do want to make your magical Christmas well-rounded and complete, darling, so I am going to decorate this tree with only occasional groping and flirting."

"That sounds good," Adam enthused, his innocent tone making Nigel give him a look that said *you're pushing it already, baby.*

They came up with some ideas on how to finish the tree, and then Adam remembered he had more tinsel in the bedroom closet. While he was off fetching it, a knock at the door made Nigel wander over, thinking nothing of opening it as if he lived there, because honestly… didn't he?

If Adam wanted to keep separate places for a while longer, he guessed he'd go along to make his baby happy, but he still fervently preferred the idea of just fucking moving straight in. After all, Adam might not be as comfortable in Nigel's place, which was bigger, but didn't have all his stuff arranged just right like this place did.

Whatever Adam wanted…

Anyway…Nigel opened the door and beheld a young woman with dark hair and an immediately disapproving expression. She was pretty in a fucking Little House on the Boring and Repressed Prairie kind of way, he guessed, if he was being charitable. But something about her screamed that she considered herself better than anyone else, and it was repulsive.

Even worse than the thought of someone else having touched *his Adam.*

"Top of the fucking morning, and who might you be?" Nigel asked, almost in a businesslike tone.

Impertinently, the woman snapped, "Who might I be? Who the hell are *you* and what are you doing in Adam's apartment?"

"Are you serious?" Nigel smirked.

He knew how he looked in Adam's bathrobe, which barely fit on him, just about covering him up. His own clothes were in the wash, since Adam had nothing else that would fit him and Nigel didn't feel like going home to get more clothes. Being away from his sweetheart at this point would just be too fucking maddening.

The blue bathrobe stretched tightly over Nigel's powerful frame, clinging to his chest where it was partially revealed in a low v. His hair was still a bit wet from Adam's shower down the hall. Why was this bitch asking what he was doing here in Adam's apartment?

"*Adam*, if you must know, although it should be fucking obvious what I'm *doing* in here."

She stared at him in shocked disbelief, and in the meantime Adam came up beside Nigel, looking puzzled. "Oh, hi Beth."

"I should have fucking known," Nigel cackled, "*Beth*."

"Who in the world is this strange man and what's going on?" Beth asked in her grating, chirpy, know-it-all tone.

"This is Nigel," Adam smiled, "Nigel, this is Beth. Glad you two had a chance to meet."

"So am I, kitten." Nigel smiled lethally at the bitch. Served her fucking right, too.

"How long have you known each other?" Beth started giving Adam the interrogation routine, what a despicable–

"Since yesterday," Adam said, emboldened by a new annoyance at her behavior.

She frowned, "Adam, you can't just trust someone that you didn't even know before yesterday. A stranger, in your apartment like…this…"

Adam replied, "It's confusing to me that you would say that. First of all because clearly, I *can* trust Nigel. I already made the decision to and he's here. Secondly, you keep saying you want me to be happy all the time, until now, when you see me actually happy."

"Adam, I do want you to be happy, but I also want you to be safe."

"Worry about your own safety, lady," Nigel laughed.

Adam gave him a Look and Nigel put his hands up, pouting.

"I think you should leave," Adam said.

Beth thought she meant Nigel, and smiled with a nod of triumph.

"No, not *him*, you," Adam continued, "I feel angry with you, Beth, and I remember that you don't like being around me when I have strong, negative and difficult emotions."

"That's not fair," Beth sighed.

“But you think it’s fair for you to keep calling me and showing up when it’s convenient to you. I almost think you’d prefer me to be kept behind glass like some intriguing exhibit, or even…” he pressed his lips together, cheeks reddening with anger. “Like a raccoon, taxidermied for you to show off. I’m tired of being an interesting and endearing story to you, so you can tell all your friends and readers how one time you dated someone abnormal and dysfunctional like me.”

“Adam! That’s not true–”

“I think it is, Beth. You didn’t care what happened to me or how I felt when you left me.”

Beth stared in disbelief because Adam never lost his temper with her in quite this way.

“We – agreed that it wasn’t working out and we were better as friends…”

“You agreed with yourself, which is the only thing you ever do. I went along so you wouldn't have to see me at my worst. At the time, I thought I was protecting you from having to feel bad or uncomfortable, but now…I see I was protecting myself. Every time I was bothersome to you just made me more miserable. But not this Christmas. Because I met Nigel.”

Nigel let Adam do his thing, impressed, merely giving Beth the occasional smug smile and otherwise remaining totally fixated on his baby.

Beth’s mouth hung open, not an attractive look.

“You said he’s a stranger,” Adam fumed, “but he’s not. He’s…to me, he’s like the feeling of waiting for Christmas when I was a kid, not wanting Christmas to actually come and be over, but just wanting to stay in that waiting. The best part. Wishing Christmas could last forever, before I grew up and dreaded all of it. Nigel reminded me of a time when I still thought forever was real, because it’s happening to me all over again. So, you see, there’s really nothing you can say to make me agree with you this time.”

“Adam, I…I’m sorry.”

Are you, are you really sorry, Beth? How about you get the fuck out, then? Nigel kept his thoughts to himself with difficulty.

“Fine. Be sorry,” Adam said scornfully. “What’s that?”

He nodded at the gift bag in her hand.

“It’s…a Christmas present. I still wanted to get together, felt badly about canceling the rest of our plans last night…and about saying we shouldn’t exchange gifts. I regretted…being so adamant that you move on from any romantic thoughts about me. It isn’t right to say that. You have to recover in your own time.”

Adam took the bag from her outstretched hand. A guilt present for ditching him. Most likely because the “fiance” had disappointed.

“Thanks a lot,” Adam said, gesturing with the gift bag. “I didn’t get you anything else. Bye, Beth.”

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They went about the rest of the Christmas day as planned: finding a perfect place to hang the new ornaments, decorating the whole tree and then taking pictures – Nigel’s arm had a great reach and he could take remarkably good photos in selfie style. Soon, there were quite a few shots of the new couple posing with their decorated tree and with their arms around each other, even kissing.

“We could get some frames. With reindeer on them and snowmen…and put these photos out every year at Christmas,” Adam suggested delightedly.

“Right!” Grinning, full of fucking butterflies, Nigel was still doing catch-up on meeting a lover as passionate and unusual as himself, as eager to jump all-in without regrets and talk about a lifetime together after one day.

He was just as fucking determined never to let his angel down, although he knew Adam would tell him not to worry about that. How could he not?

“What else do people do on Christmas?” Nigel asked, then. Because honestly…he did not have a single fucking clue.

“Uhh…well, we could make hot cocoa, and put marshmallows in it,” Adam said, quite seriously. “Maybe watch a Christmas movie? After that, we can talk again and see what we each feel like doing.”

Nigel grinned. “That’s perfect, star. I don’t think I ever did that shit in my life, despite hearing everyone talk about it.”

“It’s nice,” Adam smiled. And it was.

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By the time they finished *Miracle on 34th Street*, it was night, and Adam said he would put his pj’s on. He wasn’t quite sure how to make sex happen again, but he wasn’t worried about it either. Plus, it was so wonderful just being together, he could wait.

Nigel grabbed his clothes from the dryer and shrugged them back on, only bothering with a few shirt buttons. He wouldn’t have minded a beer, but it also just didn’t matter, like the cigarette he hadn’t indulged in hours. Not like they’d been doing him any fucking good, anyway, not like Adam.

He sat on the couch and looked at their Christmas tree, even prettier at night, and their two ornaments shining closely together, where they belonged. And then Adam came back in, immediately getting in trouble.

“Just what exactly are you wearing, you naughty little sexpot?” Nigel demanded.

“Huh?” Adam glanced down at his festively bright red and very clingy pajamas. “It’s just my long underwear. It’s *winter.* And I wear this set around Christmas because it’s an appropriate color…”

“Get over here this second, bad boy,” Nigel said, grabbing Adam’s skinny waist and hoisting him into his lap, grasping his face as Adam squealed and wrapped arms around him. “Look at you.”

Nigel kissed Adam soundly, the kind of kiss that would awaken any fairy tale character from the deepest enchanted sleep of sadness. His hands were all over Adam, appreciating the smooth, soft pj’s that stuck to him like a second skin and emphasized what Nigel apparently saw as his assets.

“Gonna open your present from that hateful bitch, then?” Nigel teased, nuzzling their noses between kisses.

“Oh,” Adam said, remembering Beth’s present. “I guess I should. I actually only took it because I was mad, but I may as well see what it is.”

He took out a plush raccoon and smiled at it. “I’ve come to dislike Beth a lot, and it is a very condescending gift, but that’s not this toy’s fault. He’s cute, soft and fluffy. I don’t think I have the heart to return him. But let’s not name him Adam.”

“He looks like a Nigel to me,” winked Nigel, holding Adam on his lap with a warm hug. “And, he’s in a good home now, so no need to send him elsewhere.”

Now that he looked at it more closely, Nigel chuckled. “That’s…that fucking, oh, what the fuck - Astro Raccoon or something from the *Guardians of the Avengers*. Look at his little uniform there.”

Adam examined it, brow furrowed. “He does look somewhat like an outer space explorer, in the most unrealistic terms of science fiction. I’ve never seen that movie.”

“Me neither, kitten. People seem to say it’s pretty good, though. Been a long time since I sat down and relaxed, much less watched a movie, other than the one with you today. But with you…I could see me becoming a fucking film buff.”

“I think I know what you mean,” Adam grinned. “And that I’ll always feel about…75% shy around you at minimum.”

“Oh, fucking ditto on that one, baby.” Nigel nudged his shoulder. “Maybe that’s okay. Keeps us on our toes.”

“Want to watch that movie tomorrow? *The Guardians of the Avengers*, with Astro Raccoon, or as we know him, Nigel the brave interstellar explorer?” Adam made the raccoon plush walk over to Nigel’s leg and look at him pleadingly.

Nigel gave Adam a besotted look. “All I can think about is your warm, gorgeous body next to mine, and how it feels when I pull you close. Cuddling with you, watching movies, just

living, just enjoying ourselves. And I can actually fucking concentrate. You put the pieces of my brain back together, baby, you make me breathe. So yeah, that's exactly what we should do. About time we both slowed it all down. What've we got to lose from starting to really live, instead of dreading everything?"

"Nothing at all."

Adam considered this for a few more moments. "We can get more snacks and drinks, and of course, meals, that you like."

"Of course we can, sunshine, but I only need this meal right now." Nigel grabbed Adam's ass and made him giggle.

Adam bit his lip happily. He thought about how this delirious co-dependence would seem to outsiders, and it appeared almost cartoonishly ludicrous, that anyone else would be able to understand what they shared.

"Do you think we're from two different worlds?" He asked Nigel curiously.

"I don't see how we can be, star. Right now, I feel like you're the only other person in the world, in any real way."

Adam grinned even more suddenly, noticing something out the window over Nigel's shoulder.

"Nigel!" he said excitedly, "Look!"

"Is that fucking snow? In fucking California?" Nigel stared at the slow cascade of sugary, crystal-white snow falling lazily down on the city. "This is wild, baby. Want to go outside and get a better look?"

Adam nodded eagerly. They put their coats on and rushed outside, hand in hand. "It's not unheard of, of course, but snow in this region, anytime of year, is extremely infrequent. Not that I'm a weather expert, but it seems almost…"

"Fucking *magic*. Like it's snowing just for us. Angel, are you doing this?" Nigel asked suspiciously, though his smile was teasing.

"You know I'm not." Adam said this casually, as if it was obvious.

"Are you sure?" Nigel gathered Adam in his arms and looked at him as if he thought Adam was made of starlight and magic, for real, and told him so.

"I'm not," Adam smiled, "Nigel, I'm just me. I'm not made up of stardust and dreams. If I even began to describe the physiological and cosmic impossibilities in phrases like that…"

"Mmm. I'd listen to you, hours and hours on end, on that and any other subject, baby, but I don't believe you for a second, that you aren't a dream, or made of stars. We'll have to agree to disagree. I feel like this could only happen with you."

Adam gazed up at the flurry-filled, dim and pink-tinged late night sky. It looked like an ethereal fairy-land, delicate and full of hope.

“If I was going to invest myself in superstitious or otherwise unfeasible theories,” Adam laughed, as Nigel pulled him into a kiss, “I’d – mmm – I would say *you* did this. You made Christmas happen.”

Nigel felt a tremor of love that seemed to rewrite and yet confirm his whole dna, which said “hopeless romantic” was inscribed on the inside of his skin and wasn’t going anywhere. He watched the fluffy snowflakes landing in Adam’s hair and how his lover’s cheeks turned pink with cold, and had to kiss him again: cold lips, warm hearts. So much hope. Broken hearts fused together, made whole in the very scheme of making no sense in the most perfect way.

“I’m cold,” Adam shivered against him. “It’s so beautiful out here, but I think I want to go inside with you now.”

“Adam, I promise, whatever fucked up mistakes I’m guilty of and however much I don’t deserve you, I’ll give my life and do anything I can to keep you warm.” Nigel hugged him tightly and Adam did the same, crying a little.

“You *do* deserve me,” Adam smiled, cupping Nigel’s face and kissing his lips. “I want to reverse every memory you have that’s making you think somehow you don’t. I realize that’s a ridiculous concept, but somehow it doesn’t seem to be with you. Let me make you warm, too. Come in with me.”

“Yes, angel,” Nigel said, noticing with a quick shiver of prideful bliss how pretty their little apartment window looked from outside with the tree displayed, how it sparkled under the pink and white sky, something really special. Something *theirs*. “One look and a kiss from you is enough to do it, but you know, I think we can do better than that. Lead the way.”

End Notes

Spacedogs playlist: https://open.spotify.com/playlist/219EKNhZnpTmaLr0F39DJM?si=485a0013330e433b
❤️🥰🎄❄️

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